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Creating Community Democracy in Schools:

Overlapping Memberships as Potentials for Public

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between how groups are defined and activated and the possibilities for community democracy in schools. Several theories of group politics are discussed including concepts such as structural conflict, overlapping memberships, and potential publics, followed by an exploration of the group focus of some contemporary democratic education literature. Next, the results of a class activity are presented that demonstrate how group political theory is reflected in graduate education student responses to political images. The students' responses support the contention that some Americans continue to view political messages in terms of broad, oppressed groupings (e.g., race and gender) but that group attachments are more complex. Finally, the merits of cultivating multiple group memberships among students across race, gender, among other groupings, are discussed.

Creating Community Democracy in Schools: Overlapping Memberships as Potentials for Public

How we define and activate groups in our society—and in our schools or classrooms—has some bearing on how we conceptualize and implement democracy. Political science and education scholars have noted the critical connection between the formation and activity of groups and how American democracy works. This paper discusses some theories related to group politics in American democracy and their relationship to some contemporary educational literature on groups often described as mistreated or marginalized (e.g., African-Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and the indigent). It seeks to extend the work of these earlier theorists by suggesting that teachers, as potential leaders in the political socialization of students, have an obligation to promote greater participation among students in classrooms through organization of classroom activities, including problem identification and formulation, issues-centered discussion and debate, group formation and reformation, and position-taking. Especially central to this discussion are the perspectives of John Dewey (1927), E.E. Schattschneider (1975), and David Truman (1951), who have all described the import of group attachments and public issue formation in creating a more active, collaborative, effective, inclusive, and interested democratic community.

The results of a classroom simulation completed recently are also presented in the following pages. They support the notion that citizens may position themselves in a much more complex array of groupings (related to particular issue positions) than those often highlighted in the contemporary educational literature reviewed here. It is argued that such complexity combined with notions of overlapping membership and potential publics (and/or "issue networks" [see

Berry, 1997]) may lend some credence to the following proposition: Once students see themselves as potentially (or actually) identified with students across racial, gender, or other so-called marginally-situated groups due to issue winning strategic considerations, the cultural problems associated with the treatment of the various disadvantaged groups may be assuaged in the classroom. Indeed, students may come to understand the need to develop broader strategic alliances, if not friendship networks, and to form more desirable conceptions of the public good. In the initial sections of the paper, I discuss the theories of Dewey (1927), Schattschneider (1975), and Truman (1951) related to these propositions.

Democracy and Community

> [Democracy] is the idea of community life itself.... The idea or ideal of a community presents...phases of associated life as they are freed from restrictive and disturbing elements, and are contemplated as having attained their limit of development. (Dewey, 1927, p. 148)

Dewey (1927) describes what his idea of, and ideal, community and democracy should entail, equating the two at times, as his words above suggest. The essence of community is a communicative association among individuals as group members (Dewey, 1916, 1927). Members of a community share experiences, and from these experiences, stem the development of shared meanings. Dewey's concept of knowledge, itself, is a function of association and communication. Moreover, his ideal Public is associations that understand experiences similarly because of their desire to establish fraternal and equitable ties while promoting liberty for all. This is thought to be possible because the concept of liberty, to Dewey, revolves around everyone promoting his brothers' [sic] "potentialities," and thus, curtailing any desire to amass resources or status to another's disadvantage. If all share in the resources for the benefit of all, each has an interest in

the direction of one another's conduct. The "consequences of associated action," in such a community, thus, begins to weigh heavily in an individual's decision to participate in community life because of the web of ramifications for the individual as part of the larger community (p. 150). The distinction between individual as self interested and/or society as oppressive is irrelevant to Dewey (1927), since the individual and the community are so interconnected in terms of the well-being of each.

Dewey (1927) does not dismiss "political democracy," (a "system of government") as significant to his conception of community, but he suggests that political democracy is important only as it serves well "social democracy" (p. 143). For example, he concludes that "all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion" lie outside of the political state, and therefore, the community must share "in selecting its governors and determining their policies" (p. 143). The goal for an ideal political democracy is to "enable the public to form and manifest its purposes still more authoritatively" (p. 146). And more, the "problem of the public" is to improve "the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion" (p. 208). A democratic political system does not have essences that make it more or less superior (or democratic) except in as much as it serves the social democracy or community.

Dewey (1927) identifies several critical problems related to the loss of the idea of, and ideal, community and democracy in society, and by extension, in schools. He states that one of the major problems of the time was creating the "conditions under which [the] Great Society [might] become the Great Community" (p. 146). The change from a more simple agrarian society to one of industrial complexity, reliance on expertise, and demographic heterogeneity had wrought havoc

on the public's sense of itself and its efficacy to address social needs. School environments, today, may face even greater complexities in our age of information explosion and with the new mix of immigrant groups from Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere as well as the shifting minority-to-majority populations, particularly in many urban schools (Rong, 1998). Dewey (1927) believed the time had come *to question traditional vehicles for political organization and issue identification and formulation*, even sacred democratic institutions--the Constitution, judiciary, contracts, or private property (p. 170).

Moreover, Dewey (1927) explains that knowledge, once rooted in common experience, has grown beyond the grasp of the public. The "profane herd [i.e., public] is excluded" (p. 164). Scientific and industrial expertise have gained prominence; communities have become highly fluxuating and mobile; individuals react to events based on emotion and habit, not on rational consideration that a more thorough understanding of the facts relevant to consequences on community would permit. The "scientific inquirer" is juxtaposed to the layman (p. 163). These conditions, of course, are still very present today. To regain the lost community, Dewey (1927) suggests that the public would have to be included in the conversation and debate about desired ends of society and educated to judge among the facts and alternatives presented, or to trace the "intricate network of interactions to their consequences" (p. 177; see also Yankelovich, 1991). Public knowledge must, in the "Great Community," equal "systematic, thorough, and well-equipped search and record" (p. 179).

Dewey (1927) also articulates the relationships among factors such as the complexities of issues, the problem of locating the public, and political engagement. He maintains that the

complexities of free trade or the plight of farmers in the aftermath of World War I are two examples that demonstrate "an inchoate public is capable of organization only when indirect consequences are perceived, and when it is possible to project agencies which order their occurrence (p. 131). 'The agencies' of the time that framed issues, however, were scrupulous in marketing values to suit their own purposes: Southern prohibitionists promoted a federal law (Volstead Act) to a region traditionally opposed to intervention in local custom; and anti-federalist farmers enacted national railroad regulation, which in turn, impacted investment bankers--generally predisposed to central government--who in turn, protested "against [the] vexatious tendency to appeal to national aid, which [they intoned,] has now become... a foolish paternalism" (p. 133). Dewey (1927) explains that only by constructing community, with the necessary underlying conditions ("systematic and continuous methods to pursue social inquiry, free expression, and the dissemination of information based on such inquiries," p. 218) is it possible for the public to find and to express itself, and to pursue the common interest through popular government and community.

Dewey's (1927) words may ring too altruistic today--possibly because he deemphasizes realpolitik in his discussions of fraternity and equality and their relationship to democratic community, that is "fraternity," which embodies

> consciously appreciated goods which accrue from an association in which all share, and which give direction to the conduct of each [or equality--] the unhampered share which each individual member of the community has in the consequences of associated action. [Equitable] because it is measured only by need and capacity to utilize, not by extraneous factors which deprive one in order that another may take and have (p. 150).

Perhaps he takes Madison's maxim too lightly ("If men were angels....") (Federalist No. 51). Or maybe he does not take Madison far enough (Federalist No. 10), which is to say that the abundance of group attachments may, indeed, produce the Public in all its richness, in all its self-interests and common interests and in all its complexity--fulfilling Dewey's desire that all individuals in the ideal democratic community "secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others [i.e., liberty;]" (p. 150). Fraternity, liberty, and equality are viable, possibly, if we admit communities-as-groups are always fluxuating and dynamic; and that some groups, becoming at one point in time a majority, are thus, more capable of realizing objectives for *all those attached*, while at other times, becoming a minority of minorities, attempting to gain, *encore une fois*, the majority say, while holding on to their community attachments all the same. Dewey (1927) approximates this (pp. 207-208). Better yet, it may be more precise if we define communities as overlapping to the extent that a member of one is included in the majority and at the same time, in the minority, simultaneously on different issues. At this point, Schattschneider (1975) helps to contribute more fully to a theory of creating democratic community in schools.

Lack of Political Leadership: a Semisovereign People

> Democracy is a political system in which the people have a choice among the alternatives created by competing political organizations and leaders. (Schattschneider, 1975, p. 138)

While Dewey's (1927) work is focused primarily on reestablishing community and meeting the public's common interests through a collaboratively arrived at process, Schattschneider's (1975) emphasis is on power relationships and political strategy to gain predominance in arenas of conflict, and as importantly, on how America's political leaders have failed to define conflict in

ways that would bolster political participation among the public. He also concludes that America's political structures and institutions may not be serving its public well. Schattschneider (1975) claims that how we structure conflict (i.e., articulate issues) is central to the concept of politics because it defines "the way people are divided into factions, parties, groups, classes, etc. The outcome of the game of politics depends on which of a multitude of possible conflicts gains the dominant position" (p. 60). He continues, "*[T]he definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power*" (p. 66). Unlike Dewey, Schattschneider (1975) describes democracy as a political system, not primarily a social system, though the two conceptions are not mutually exclusive; he notes that communities, as group affiliations, can be important in arriving at shared meanings on particular issue positions, for instance, southern conservatives, poor whites in the South, urban or rural dwellers, and McCarthyites (p. 71).

Schattschneider (1975), however, is more willing to allow that realpolitik demands that communities will not necessarily arrive at common conclusions. Thus, he would most likely judge harshly Dewey's notion that shared experience and meaning result in uniform conclusions about shared interests because of the multiple, overlapping, conflicting societal arrangement of groups, which may share some commonalities, but are destined to derive different meanings from events and/or possess different values due to a variety of differences among group attachments and the opportunistic inclinations of political elites. Madison alludes to this partly in Federalist No. 10: "The diversity in the faculties of men [sic], from which the rights of property originate, is not less an insuperable obstacle to a uniformity of interests.... [T]he most common and durable source of factions has been the verious and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those

without property have ever formed distinct interests in society" (Rossiter, 1961, pp. 78-79). But Schattschneider's (1975) explanation of group attachments is more complex than property relations: In fact, he states that the very reason that the southern conservative "uses the racial antagonism" is "to keep poor [southern] whites in line;" that "the use of sharply sectional alignment [was] to destroy the radical agrarian movement"--dividing a community built around shared interests rooted in the Populist movement, a multidimensional interest group (also see Truman, 1951, pp. 165-166). Moreover, urban and rural conflicts congeal around issues of ethnicity, religious tolerance, or tax liabilities, even freedom of expression issues such as those that inhere in Art exhibitions--be it dance, theater, visual, or other forms expressive of a broad spectrum of moral considerations (Langer, 1957).

Schattschneider (1975) may be interpreted as much more at odds with Dewey (1927) around their conceptions of democracy, since the former describes the following elements as the essence of democratic politics: "conflict, competition, leadership, and organization" (p. 136). These essentials can, according to Schattschneider, help to produce popularly supported decisions, since they help "to define the alternatives, to organize the discussion and [to] mobilize opinion" (p. 136). Some factors, however, currently serve to impede the effective realization of these central elements of democratic politics. For instance, Schattschneider (1975) identified problems such as non-engaged political parties, misleading finger-pointing aimed at a mislabeled public (i.e., uninformed and/or apathetic), an "ideology of privatization" (p. 7), anti-majoritarian government structures (e.g., separation of powers, federalism), the unengaging or bigoted framing of issues,

and the lack of public forums or agencies to facilitate "working through" issues (also see Yankelovich, 1991).

Some of the specific problems Schattschneider (1975) describes in this list demonstrate the opportunities that teachers may have to promote classroom political participation in the short and long term, while simultaneously finding "potentialities" for community building across cultures of race, gender, and so forth (p. 109). Teachers can facilitate the process of student problem identification, issue framing, group formation and reformation, and position taking--that is, to empower students while enabling them to make explicit multiple community attachments, as minorities and as factions in majorities (much like Schattschneider describes the relationship between pressure groups and the major parties). Teachers may provide opportunities for students to 'socialize conflict,' that is, to enlarge the number of discussants through introducing new ways to structure conflicts (or frame issues) or by informing more of their cohorts about salient issues, in a safe environment--the school. Safe environment may be defined as one in which the classroom community agrees upon the rules of the game (civil rights protection, civility, etc.). Students should be taught to understand a safe environment is important for all since everyone will most likely be in the minority themselves when considering some issues. Moreover, Schattschneider (1975) states that the expansion of conflict is the [m]ost powerful instrument for the control of conflict" (p. 65), ensuring a multiplicity of cross-cutting group cleavages and potentially optimizing each individual's sense of belonging to many groups, and therefore, to the Public.[1] He may be on common ground with Dewey here. Truman (1951) has also written about

conflicting, multiple group attachments as potentials for public, and it is to some of his ideas that we turn next.

Groups and Democracy

> What we seek are correctives, protections, or controls that will strengthen the practices essential in what we call democracy.... We shall not begin to achieve control until we have arrived at a conception of politics that adequately accounts for the operations of political groups. (Truman, 1951, p. 12)

Truman (1951) explores the relationship between the nature of groups and the issues that receive attention by government. He explains that a principal problem in American democracy is that some groups (e.g., farmers, urbanites, labor, veterans, among others) appear to be gaining privileges at the expense of the common weal (pp. 11-12). His efforts, therefore, are put toward describing the nature of group politics in contemporary society and its interaction with the current constitutional order and informal processes of governing and winning public goods. It is not the purpose of this paper to review in-depth the full array of questions that Truman pursues, especially with respect to processes within government, but merely to outline some of his explanations related to group formation, activities, and processes, and their connection to creating community democracy in schools.

Truman (1951) defines groups in two ways; first, as "categoric;" and second, as relational (pp. 23-24); Categoric groupings (e.g., alcoholics, blondes, farmers, etc.) do not, on their face, help us to explain political activity since they may or may not guide behavior. Relational groupings, on the other hand according to Truman (1951), do hold promise for understanding political behavior since they most likely have some impact on the resultant shared behavioral norms and attitudes (p. 26). While he does not deny that a group reflective of categoric variables

may help to define a "social unit," he is careful to emphasize that the critical component is the pattern of interactions: "The significance of a family group in producing similar attitudes and behaviors among its members lies, *not in their physical resemblance or in their proximity, as such, to each other, but in the characteristic relationships among them*" (p. 24, italics added). He adds that when societies become complex, like industrial America, specialization and division of labor naturally lead to more complex interaction patterns. Furthermore, when these interactions are stable, uniform, formal, and general (i.e., institutionalized), they reflect a balanced set of group forces, and are only interrupted when a disturbance of necessary intensity rearranges the patterns of interactions (pp. 24-28). Moreover, once organized in a political interest group, members who interact on a regular basis make "claims upon other groups in society" (p. 33).

Truman (1951) explains that interaction patterns change due to the salience of new issues which confront various publics, which have conflicting value priorities based on attachment to different groups. Public issues (e.g., substantive or procedural ['rules of the game' violations, pp. 512-513]), thus, can become the disturbances that rearrange the patterns of relationships due to the complex, competing nature of multiple group memberships (e.g., competing business group interests related to issues from reciprocal trade to farm subsidies to the establishment of the minimum wage, p. 63). As Schattschneider (1975) notes, cross-cutting issues create new publics from what Truman (1951) describes as potential publics--group attachments grounded in shared values and/or attitudes that lie dormant until prompted by an event or disturbance. Even more, Truman notes that groups seek to establish alliances based on their desire to protect themselves or gain from, or adapt to, the disturbance. He illustrates this phenomenon through issues such as

efforts by stockmen to extend grazing privileges on public lands, a push by a "Citizens Committee" to reorganize the federal Executive Branch, and alliances formed among veterans, Blacks, farmers and lawyers groups to pass unemployment legislation (pp. 359-363).

Political parties help to combine these diverse and shifting sets of alliances, according to Truman (1951). Political parties are organizations that help to build coalitions among factions, to respond to citizens in their group associations, and to channel citizen efforts to act effectively (p. 271). For the purposes here, it is unnecessary to visit in-depth Truman's commentary on the diversity encountered within party politics itself, but it may be worthwhile to note that political parties are not cohesive, centralized organizations. Thus, the Democratic or Republican parties of different regions or governmental levels may pose another level of complexity to group attachments when individuals are confronted with a 'disturbance.' An example of conflicting value priorities related to conflicting, multiple group memberships and intra-party conflict (e.g., national versus local Democratic party organizations) might include a choice facing loggers who are conservative Democrats from the South. On an issue related to federal forest reclamation and logging prohibition programs, Southern, conservative Democrats may very well join the Republicans in an election between a Democratic presidential candidate, who favors the program and a Republican candidate who opposes it. Value priorities such as local control and/or employment may be salient in their decisions.

In spite of the many potential uses of Truman's ideas, there are a number of caveats that he raises that may impede teachers' use of group activities to create community democracy in their classrooms. For instance, Truman (1951) notes that individuals participate in groups for reasons

unrelated to substantive issues (p. 279). Psychic rewards, feelings of belonging or the desire to follow group norms, even financial incentives, are factors that contribute to group allegiance. Children and adolescent students are very likely influenced by these considerations even more than adults. Moreover, if school officials structure students' environments, as has been documented (Glickman, 1998), so that patterns of interactions are defined by categoric variables (e.g., race or class), then teachers may be limited in their efforts to provide opportunities for students to interact across these groups. Truman (1951) also explains the human limitation of belonging to too many groups (p. 15). Students are limited by the cumbersome nature of juggling too many group attachments, which offer unique status rewards for belonging. Also, students will face value choices in their desire to belong to more than a few groups, limiting interaction with a wide spectrum of individuals. Concerns raised by external forces to the school (e.g., parents or other interest groups) may also pose significant barriers to classroom activities, which provide students with opportunities to find common ground with their peers around public issues.

Nonetheless, the ideas from theories of group politics provide a rationale for why students should be taught to organize with others to impact issues. Students may gain some understanding of the probabilities that each member of the class will be in the minority at some point, that winning in politics requires a willingness to build coalitions across many different "categoric" groups, and that the two party political system and other constitutional structures demand some conformity to and/ or compromise with, the values and interests of other groups. Truman (1951), Dewey (1927), and Schattschneider (1975), all draw on numerous historical examples to buttress their theories. As with most theories, however, none of these fit precisely with other evidence as

described by current education scholars. Nor do these theories align completely with the outcome of an in-class political simulation conducted recently. The following section discusses some of the education literature related to group identity and an in-class simulation.

Some Theories, Some Practices, and a Simulation

Professional journals such as *Democracy & Education* or *Theory and Research in Social Education*, among many others, highlight the value many in the education community place on particular groups which are singled out as deserving just treatment (Baber, 1995; Bloom, 1998; Boyle-Blaise, 1995; Edelsky, 1997; Goodman, 1997; Koegel, 1997; Murphy, 1997; Pang, Gay, & Stanley, 1995; Singer, 1995).[2] These scholars agree that American diversity across gender, race, sexual orientation, class, language, among other characteristics, should be celebrated, not denigrated or 'dominated.' In this they at least partly follow in the tradition of many Americans who supported the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, those who recognized the value of a diverse society in preventing majority (or parochial) tyranny, and thus, in arriving at political decisions that might more ably serve the public good (Rossiter, 1961).[3] Of course, educators who write about celebrating diversity do so not only because it prevents harm to any single minority, but also, because it makes possible greater variety in life experiences and richer community life, and promotes individual growth (Dewey, 1916, 1927).

Some educators appear willing to explore human diversity more fully among students (and others) so as not to diminish their potential for making connections across associations. Davidson, Hammerman, and Schniedewind (1997), for instance, describe various aspects from their learning activities sourcebook, *Open Minds to Equality*. In this program students are (a)

taught skills in community building, particularly those of establishing "trust and respect for differences among themselves" and related skills such as "interviewing, consensus decision-making, role-playing, and cooperative group work" (p. 39); and (b) presented with case studies to help them understand better the variety of experiences of individuals usually perceived as homogenous. In so doing, they make students conscious of their own stereotypes, both of others and themselves, based on narrowly defined group categorizations. These scholar/practitioners note, for instance, that in interpreting the identity of people of color or those who have disabilities based solely on the dimensions of race or ability, we do not promote the fullest potential of individuals, both those categorized and those doing the categorizing. They include the following cases as examples of these problems--contrasting the identities of native African-Americans to those African-Americans recently coming to the U.S. or the identities of individuals with various types of disabilities (p. 39). Importantly, these educators describe group membership in terms of *disadvantages and advantages* or constitutive of "a mix of privilege and disadvantage" (p. 39). Students in the program also learn that negative attitudes are shaped by "powerful societal structures that use difference to justify inequality," and students are pushed to pursue actions to ameliorate discriminatory conditions (p. 39).

Logan (1997) constructed an activity that went beyond emphasizing a single dimension of students (i.e., gender) to demonstrate that boys and girls have many potentials for connection (e.g., bedroom designs) and to make students conscious of social constructions of gender that may be unrelated to what they truly value as individuals. Her exercise also promoted the exploration of the "*advantages and disadvantages* connected with each [gender's] projected

image" (p. 25, italics added). Specifically, Logan requires her students "to travel back in time," asking them what they were wearing, or doing, or like, from as early as they can remember up through the present (p. 24). Then, students are asked to replay the scenario, but this time imagining that they were the opposite gender. They write their ideas to compare later when they share their thoughts about one another--perceived gendered expectations, values, goals, and so forth. Logan's exercise appears to contribute to her students clarifying misconceptions of the opposite gender (and their own) and questioning the false dichotomies of what society says is appropriate female or male attributes or values. In Logan's (1997) words

> [students] don't have to be in the 'girl camp' or the 'boy camp.' They shift from the personal view, 'I am a girl, girls are better,' to an awareness that certain pressures and expectations are exerted on them as females that may or may not fit who they really are. Same with boys. Many boys don't play sports. Many girls don't have pink bedrooms with doll collections. I notice also that they receive information on gender differently, with a more skeptical attitude, and begin to perceive their own gender-filter affects their thinking, feelings, and attitudes (p. 26).

Kivel and Creighton (1997) describe power relationships in terms of a variety of group attachments. Beyond gender, race, sexual orientation, and class associations, these educators note that power is exercised through associations rooted in age, physical ability, religion, among many other's (p. 28). Furthermore, they emphasize that power is used to commit acts of violence against those who are different. They suggest that structuring the debate around the issue of violence instead of the oppression of one or two major groups, may help promote the idea that we all, because of our differences, are interdependent on one another to keep safe. Even though Kivel and Creighton equate being male and/or white with possessing power over others, these educators, at least, attempt to broaden our lens to see the variety of possible group

attachments and patterns of domination, including categorizing teachers, the "Able-bodied," and those "born in the U.S.," as oppressors—a vast grouping, which includes subsets of females, those of color, among other marginalized groups, of course (p. 28).

Other examples that educators describe which capitalize on the multiplicity of group attachments that are possible across the categorizations of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class, include: Peterson's (1990) formation of "the Alliance for Whole Language," (p. 7); Bigelow's (1990) history class investigations of the "alliances between black and poor whites during Reconstruction" or laborites who struck textile mills, even as they attempted "to overcome divisions between men and women and between workers speaking over a dozen languages" (p. 15); Hutchinson's (in Hunt, 1990) efforts to provide students—as a class unit— with the opportunity to decide what the topics for instruction will be (p. 28); Sweeny's (1992) class story telling (p. 22); Putney School's (Sachs, 1992) emphasis on "developing complete individuals who are conscious citizens of multiple communities [current events discussion group, applied physics participants, literary contributors, Chinese culinary chefs, outdoor activists, and so forth] (pp. 35, 38); and Turrill's (1996) compliments-in-a-circle and problem solving activities (p. 41).

On the other hand, some educators (Edelsky, 1997; Goodman, 1997; Koegel, 1997; Murphy, 1997) seem to categorize students, and others--even themselves (Boyle-Baise, 1995)--in one or two major domains, too often casting them as victims rather than as individuals who have multiple potential associational dimensions, with opportunities to make connections outside of a single characteristic that disadvantages them. An over zealous focus on particular subgroupings may prevent us from fulfilling our potential as individuals and as a community (Steele,

1990). Dewey (1916) suggests that participating with others in the larger community should help us to grow individually and to arrive at decisions that reflect a more just society or the common good. To emphasize our attachment to any one community, whether characteristic of race, gender, sexual orientation, or capability, etc., may erect barriers that prevent us from participating in the public space that we all should share (Arendt, 1963; Elshtain, 1995; Hudson, 1998). Americans are well-known for their memberships in many associations. An in-class simulation demonstrated the potential for group connections that cut across divisions of race, gender, and other groups.

The results of an in-class simulation are presented below. They suggest that students view political images in ways that reflect multiple, potential group commitments. The activity explored the political meanings that graduate education students in a northeastern college impute to a set of magazine photographs. Several of the photographs were selected specifically because of their clear depiction of subgroups currently receiving a great deal of attention in democratic education literature (e.g., African Americans, females, gays and lesbians, and the indigent). Other photographs were included to preclude students from deducing the focus of the activity while providing realistic alternatives related to the values such as patriotism, aesthetics, sports, alcoholic indulgence, or reading and education as a favorite pastime (e.g, artist's rendition of a chair, stack of gardening books, glass of champaign, sports schedule, or photo of a model T with flags waving). Thus, the study participants were presented with a wide array of images that may have tapped into many possible values they hold, and therefore, did not focus their attention solely on values connected merely to race, gender, sexual orientation, or class.

The particular focus of the in-class activity, was to see if these 31 mostly white (but of mixed gender) graduate students in my foundations of education course framed issues in a way that reflected an emphasis on issues related to specific marginalized subgroups especially prominent in professional journal discussions. The students in the class were directed to respond, using their own political values as a guide, to what the photographic images represented. Specifically, they were to describe what the most salient political message was that the image represented and to present it in the form of a public issue. Students were also to select and analyze only five of the ten images that they believed spoke to the political values most important to them. The activity was embedded in a simulation designed to focus students' attention on political citizenship as a primary purpose of education. The students' reactions to the photographs suggest that other characteristics reflective of multiple group attachments (e.g., parent, advocacy for children, free speech, health, or consumerism), not merely gender, race, or sexual orientation, play a role in how issues are framed and with which associations students identify as central to the analysis of public decisions. Many of the responses, however, support the conclusion that the characteristics of race, gender, and class, continue to preoccupy a large measure of the education communities' associative orientation toward public problems.

Images, Groups, and Framing The Public Good

The graduate students selected the following photographs as the five most important of the ten provided: (1) a four year-old child who is faced with the decision to leave her adoptive parents (shown standing at the door with child looking at them not the camera) and to return to her biological mother. The adoptive parents are African American, the child is white; (2) "Virginia

Slims—It's A Women's Thing" caption with package of cigarettes displayed; (3) movie slide depicting a man holding a gun to woman's head; (4) a photograph of a Model T automobile and American flags waving, with students identifying patriotism as an important issue; (5) prominent African-American ministers Sharpton and Butts addressing the media in front of other African Americans.[4] The students ranked the Gay and Lesbian Personals advertisement sixth.

The adoptive/biological parent image was considered most important politically. Student responses to the photograph offer evidence that race, gender, and class issues continue to dominate some of the social group constructions in the minds of the education students. For instance, of the nine separate categories of problem statements (or public issue positions) imputed to the photograph by the students, four of the nine clearly are linked to these associations. The students' statements included: minority status of custodial parents should have no bearing on their rights to raise a child; economic and/or social constraints on biological parents should not keep them from their children indefinitely; male dominated judicial system should not determine child's fate where nurturing is concerned; and society should subsidize single parents, so they can take care of their own kids. Four of the statement classifications did not appear to be explicitly related to issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class: child should not be taken from mother who raised her after abandoned by biological parents; biological parents should have rights over child; children should have right to choose their caregivers; the issue is whether nature or nurture provides best environmental conditions for individual growth. We might, of course, find that after further individual student probing the statement "biological parent should have rights over child" may surreptitiously be a statement reflecting the belief that minorities should not have a 'right' to

take a white child from her 'white' parents or that "women who carry fetuses have special rights of ownership."[5] One of the responses was indeterminate: Determining custodial care for children must be based on factors (unspecified) other than biological or foster relationships. Nevertheless, several of the statement categories seem to imply that other associations, parents (biological or adoptive) or children rights advocates, even philosophical similarities (e.g., nature/nurture or government intervention), may be points of associations outside of the race, gender, and/or other categories.

The Virginia Slims advertisement photograph was rated the second highest in political value. The variety of political opinions, again, demonstrated that several individuals did not superimpose the gender association onto the advertisement. In fact, only one of the six response categories explicitly linked this to a women's issue: society should subsidize research and medical services for women (advertisement just another slap in the face for women). Other political values assigned to the photograph included: cigarettes should be banned; mass advertising of health related hazard (i.e., Slims) should be banned; there should be mass public campaigns against the negative effects of cigarettes on children; advertisement represents the freedom to choose; and advertisement represents creativity. Group associations around values such as freedom from government regulation, health consumerism, and child advocacy are all distinguishable from, though potentially overlap, the realms of the race, gender, sexual orientation, or class grouping.

Students ranked the movie slide of a man pointing a gun at a woman's head as the third most politically salient. Due to the explicitly forceful nature of the depiction, it came as little surprise that the image evoked from students responses to the issues of violence toward women, sexual

inequality, the forceful ways through which men maintain dominant relationships with women, and domestic violence. Even with such a powerful image, however, many students, female and male, focused on issues apart from gender. Several students described the image in terms of how personal crisis can overtake appropriate behavior. One student lamented that it probably represented a disoriented man, probably unemployed, no money and a family to feed—"no one wants to hire him." Other interpretations included the prevalence of violence in society and the need for stricter law, safety, and protection for all; the connection between violence in the media and violence in society, and Hollywood's influence on the political values of society; finally, one student commented that the photograph represented the necessary place for TV violence to permit a release of emotions not acceptable in society. The specific nature of the photograph may have evoked a consciousness toward gender issues, but even here, other focuses—allusion to the pressures of being poor and an anti-media group—were also present

The photograph of African American ministers Butts and Sharpton addressing a rally among, and standing amidst, other African American ministers, was selected by students as representative of the fifth most politically important value. Here again the connection in the mind of many students to Sharpton's long-time involvement in city politics was reflected in the responses. A majority of the students drew a connection between the photograph and race relations, minority rights, equality, and African Americans trying to gain more power and representation within the system. Several students interpreted the image in broader terms such as the desirable nature of free speech and of protests staged "to help 'the people,' to raise hell, [to] be blunt." Two

students thought it was disingenuous to make a case that violence was primarily a race relations issue.

The photograph that students identified as the sixth most valuable politically was the gay and lesbian personal ads. Many of the students noted the precarious position of same sex partners in our society. The students comments included: people's lifestyles are their own business; should gay couples be allowed to marry and be covered by each other's work benefits?; another oppressed group who may be finding a successful avenue to find those similarly situated, an indication of hope; legal rights should include sexual orientation preferences; or homosexuals are always depicted as looking for sexual partners. On the other hand, other students focused on broader issues: consumer fraud inflicted through personal ads; freedom of speech; toleration; sexual liberation. Two students demonstrated some ambivalence about their attitudes toward homosexuals. One said he had gay friends but didn't approve of their lifestyle; another student supported the privacy rights surrounding lifestyle choices, but then added, "children shouldn't have access [to the personals]." Finally, some of the students simply asserted that personal ads, in general, are unhealthy or are a fraud that entices the unsuspecting consumer. Two students suggested that their use represents desperation on the consumer's part to find a relationship.

Discussion

The students' evaluations of, and responses to, the photographs demonstrate the complexity of overlapping group memberships and how public issues are framed in terms of potential group loyalties. Many of the voices that speak through the professional and academic literature emphasize the need to provide justice to individuals located within a limited number of group

classifications—racial minorities, females, gay and lesbians, or the poor. The results of the class activity presented here reflect the critical importance that many of the students in my course assigned to these groups and the struggle for justice. The student interpretations, however, reveal a much more complex system of potential group attachments that are often ignored, and therefore, not fully explored—possibly at the expense of the individual's growth, of achieving collaboration between groups often thought antagonistic to one another, and of constructing decisions for the public good.

Contrary to many of the messages voiced by present-day democratic education advocates, American society may be greatly injured, and indeed, civility itself destroyed (see Elshtain, 1995, pp. 5-21; Hudson, 1998, pp. 75-111) by invoking the fury of one group against another, whether African-American women against white women (Lorde, 1997, pp. 8-10), women against white or African-American males (Goodman, 1997, pp. 20-21; Koegel, 1997; Palmer, 1997), middle class or other groups against the poor (Kivel and Creighton, 1997; O'Loughlin, 1997), whites against African-Americans (Murphy, 1997), or younger generations against their elders (Kivel and Creighton, 1997; Sweeney, 1997, pp. 16-19).[6] To make claims about a group, which shares one or two characteristics in common, maintaining systems of domination over other major groups is to make a sweeping statement that ignores a great deal of sociological and historical data (topics such as slavery in the South and poor white males or the draft of many American men [white and black] to fight the war in Vietnam, come to mind) and does not adequately reflect the complexity of decision making in various areas of public policy or private lives which cut across groupings. It also does not address fairly, a majority of those in the so-called 'privileged' category who have not

enjoyed many of the benefits nor structured the "injustice" so often attributed to them. White males may resist multiculturalism, as Goodman (1997) suggests, but they may do so because they are categorized unidimensionally (white or male), and thus, summarily castigated for being 'the problem,' not necessarily or primarily because of socio-psychological theories related to their "individualistic and separate sense of [selves]" (p. 21). Focusing on one or two characteristics of individuals as salient while ignoring their multidimensional nature makes for greatly exaggerated generalizations; those in the out-group are othered. The debate is full of absurdities, of all encompassing statements draped in 'them against us' language (e.g., men versus women, African Americans against whites) (Murphy, 1997). Such characterizations do little to build a healthy democracy or trust in community.

Conclusion

A "community democracy" (Dixon, 1998) entails recognizing that the many differences among individuals should be celebrated, that at least some of these differences are related to the commitments each of us makes to groups, and that the recognition of our multiplicity of group loyalties may be an avenue to achieve greater unity in society. A white male, with a college education, who is short and gregarious and cycles long distances for exercise can be distinguished from others across many groupings. But these characteristics also demonstrate the numerous potential connections that he may establish with others who possess a college education, or who are cyclists, and so forth. His skin color or ethnicity or gender does not necessarily preclude the cyclist from developing positive relationships with an African American female who also enjoys cycling and sees controlling traffic or developing bike lanes as problems that need to be

addressed. Short high school students may be excluded from playing basketball with tall roundballers, but there may be other characteristics that the basketballers share with those who are not so tall.[7] Those who are different across one dimension cannot capitalize on their commonalities with another person if he or she does not want to associate with others because of one of those characteristics—race or gender, for instance. But Lorde (1997) may go too far when condemning a person with such an elaborate number of potential connections with others, those who are "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" (p. 8). When viewing differences within the context of multiple opportunities for connection (potential publics), not as reasons upon which to discriminate against or point the accusatory finger, we more ably capture the trust required for, and the possibilities of, community democracy.

Teachers may be able to capitalize on the diversity that is in the student-public by providing classroom activities and structures for students to identify their many areas of overlapping group membership. Cusick (1991) has identified multiple identities of students not necessarily related to their culturally disadvantaged group status discussed in some of the educational literature reviewed here. "Preps, druggies, brains, losers, breakers, theater people, jocks" are among Cusick's list of student self-described identities (p. 281). Granted, Cusick (1991) also found that students self-identified with the categories of race, economic, and/or language proficiency status, at times. Important underlying values of community democracy, however, may be achieved when teachers structure opportunities for students who differ along significant dimensions (race, gender, ability, etc.) to collaborate in identifying issues of concern to them, framing issues in multiple ways, forming and reforming majority coalitions, experiencing minority status, and

participating in decision making (and winning and losing). Some research supports the notion that interracial or mixed ability or cross-gender cooperative projects may help students to identify characteristics they have in common while submerging other culturally important differences (Van Sickle, 1979). The classroom results presented in this paper demonstrate the multiple communities with which graduate education students self-identified. Building community democracy is not, as Bigelow (1990) rightly claimed, "encourag[ing] students to see themselves as victims" and to become cynics in the process (p. 17). Creating community democracy is recognizing areas of overlapping membership as potentials for public

Footnotes

[1]It is important to note that intensity of conflict may also produce the opposite effect. Teachers must always be on guard to diffuse polarization around particular issues, just as political parties attempt to avoid position-taking (or platform fights) on issues like abortion.

[2]The program bulletin of the most recent annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal (1999) demonstrates the continued emphasis that many education scholars and practitioners place on understanding phenomena through identities rooted in ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

[3]The author is painfully aware that during the time of the Constitution's adoption, African-Americans were enslaved, women did not possess the right to vote, among other rights, and Native Americans were slaughtered unmercifully. And, of course, there is more....

[4]While the photograph of a Model T automobile and American flags waving was selected as the fourth most valuable image, it was included merely to provide variety to those photographs of specific subgroups, African Americans, women, class, sexual orientation. Patriotism is, of course, a central value of many groups.

[5]My thanks to a colleague, Professor Randy Bomer, for helping me to elaborate other possible meanings the students responses may have had and for carefully reviewing an initial draft of this paper.

[6]One of the most glaring problems with much of the literature discussing democracy and education is the use of highly abstract terms (i.e., equality, justice, freedom) considered essential to the meaning of democracy and desirable educational practice. Yet, a definition of these

concepts is rarely provided outside of mere abstractions that come to have a feel good quality, but no concrete application. In her search for equality, it is illustrative that Lorde (1997) does not emphasize the need to "recognize differences among [men] who are [women's] equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each others' differences to enrich our visions and our joint struggles" (p. 10). Why does she exclude men in constructing "patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (p. 8)?

[7]Mahaffey (1992) described noticing that while some girls like to play basketball, boys do not permit it. He concluded, "Why did I allow a 'might-makes-right' playground, where the boys decide where they will play and with whom—which in practice means no girls" (p. 10). It is important to note that short and uncoordinated boys are many times excluded as well.

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